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Ministry of Health
Ministry of Education

HEALTHY LESSONS LAST A LIFETIME

VANCOUVER – The overall health and well-being of B.C. students is improving thanks to efforts such as Healthy Schools and ActNow BC, but schools still need a more comprehensive approach to promoting health, according to a report released today by provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

An Ounce of Prevention Revisited: A Review of Health Promotion and Selected Outcomes for Children and Youth in B.C. Schools found that a majority of students and youth in B.C. rate their health and well-being quite highly. Fewer students than ever before are smoking. Alcohol and cannabis use have decreased since 1998 and fewer young teens are engaged in sexual activity. Less favourable indicators for health include the number of overweight or obese students, the percentage of those who suffer from anxiety disorders, the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted infections and cyber-bullying.

"Healthy students are better learners and those with a better education are healthier," said Dr. Kendall. "This report identifies key areas where schools can play an active role in encouraging behaviours among students that will make a positive difference in their health from the time they first enter a classroom through adolescence and for the rest of their lives."

An Ounce of Prevention Revisited explores how schools can work effectively to influence the health and well-being of young British Columbians. The report updates and expands the scope of the original report released by B.C.'s top public health official in 2003.

"Investing in a healthy start is something we owe to our children," said Health Minister George Abbott. "Good health in both body and mind is critical and something that we heard loud and clear in the Conversation on Health and is reinforced in the provincial health officer's report."

Recommendations in the report include:

- Develop a provincial-level report card that would evaluate whether school health promotion activities are working.
- Introduce a Keeping Healthy and Responsible Decision-making course for Grade 12.
- Work to minimize differences in educational achievement and health related to differences in gender or urban/rural.
- Increase early learning opportunities and support for at-risk students, and promote mental health.

"It's vital for students to be healthy if they are to achieve their full potential, which is why B.C. schools are passionate about ActNow BC, Action Schools! BC and our Healthy Schools Network," said Education Minister and Deputy Premier Shirley Bond. "We know there are still areas where we can improve, and this report gives us an opportunity to examine how we might do that."

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In releasing the report, Dr. Kendall acknowledged the many positive strides that have already been taken by schools and the Province in response to the first report, such as Healthy Schools, Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Learning Resources, Action Schools! BC, and Friends for Life, an intervention program that helps to reduce anxiety and build resilience in children.

The 2003 report's recommendation to increase early learning opportunities has also been acted on by the Province, as the latest provincial budget sets aside funding for 400 StrongStart early learning centres as a way to improve readiness to learn in young British Columbians.

To further promote healthy choices and lifestyles in children and youth, the Province has expanded the School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, mandated daily physical activity for students, and has eliminated the sale of junk food in elementary schools. The government will eliminate junk food sales in secondary schools by September 2008 and has passed legislation to ban tobacco use on school grounds.

A copy of An Ounce of Prevention may be viewed on the provincial health officer's website at www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho/.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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BACKGROUNDER

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AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION REVISITED

The 2006 annual report An Ounce of Prevention Revisited provides an update on some of the key issues in child and youth health and looks at how both the school setting and the health of young British Columbians have changed since 2003. As a result of these changes, the latest report offers 10 new recommendations, as follows:

- **Evaluate new initiatives and develop a consolidated report card:** the provincial government should develop a single, provincial-level report card that contains the results from various health-promoting activities.
- **Make better use of existing data:** determine what works and what can be learned from high-performing schools and/or school districts.
- **Develop and implement a Keeping Healthy Course for Grade 12 students:** the course should emphasize responsibility related to risk-taking behaviour, such as substance use and sex, and include the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.
- **Improve reporting of milestones and understanding of differences between sexes and school districts:** Participation rates for milestones such as Foundation Skills Assessments have fallen, and schools need to find ways to minimize differences where health and educational achievement differ between genders and school districts.
- **Increase support to at-risk students:** develop and evaluate specific programs to assist children in care and ensure these students and other at-risk children feel they belong, are accepted and welcomed by other students and teachers.
- **Support increased early learning monitoring and opportunities:** make use of the Early Development Instrument for every child at initial school entry, whether in kindergarten or Grade 1. Also, make use of StrongStart early learning centres to provide health promotion materials to the families of pre-kindergarten children.
- **Expand smoke-free environments for young people:** ban smoking in vehicles where children are present, as well as in foster homes of children in care.
- **Expand mental health initiatives:** consider expanding evidence-based programs such as Friends for Life.
- **Continue to promote and support health in schools:** build on the success to date and support the growth of the Healthy Schools Network, K-12 physical activity programs and the partnership between health and education.
- **Provide healthy programs to all Aboriginal and independent schools:** ensure Aboriginal band schools have access to all school health programs and services.

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In the 2008 throne speech, the Province committed to two of this report's recommendations, by adding another 316 StrongStart BC centres within the next two years and by banning smoking in vehicles where children are present.

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